Interview with Mr. Arthur C. Pearson
Conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson and
Miss Paula Boyer - June 17, 1977

TAPE 1 - SIDE 1 & 2

DODSON: Mr. Pearson, I wonder if you would give us your full name and tell us how long you've lived here in the valley?

PEARSON: Well my full name is Arthur C. Pearson and I have personally lived in the valley since 1915.

BOYER: Can you tell us when you were born?

PEARSON: I was born in the City of Los Angeles and my parents moved here in 1915. Prior to that time, my father commuted from Los Angeles to the California Organ Company of Van Nuys. And of course the commuting trip in those days was extremely tiring. He had for example, had to get up at 4:00 a.m. in the morning to get to work in Van Nuys, at that time on rail commuting devices by 7:00 o'clock in the morning.

DODSON: What kind of work did your father do in the organ factory?

PEARSON: My father was a professional organ pipe builder. For example, he had charge of building the consoles and key

desks, and the factions dealing with the pipe organs primarily. And those of you that have been recent buffs of the Great Theater Organ Press, imagine what I am illustrating, when I speak of the console and the key desk, and associated factions.

DODSON: Since we're talking about organs Mr. Pearson, I wonder if you can correct the common misapprehension of the organ in the Van Nuys High School?

PEARSON: The organ in the Van Nuys High School was built by the California Organ Company and the original key desk...the console should have the original name plate, designating that and installed in 1915. That was subsequent to the formation of the school districts in the valley, one being in Van Nuys, one being in Marion and one being in Owensmouth. All three of these schools were provided with extensive novelty of the pipe organs.

DODSON: No one has told us that before, so I'm glad to know that. Do you have any idea what happened to the organs in the other schools?

PEARSON: I believe the one at Owensmouth, which is now Canoga Park High School is still there. As far as my

reference to Marion, which is now the community of Reseda, I really don't know.

DODSON: Well that's interesting, because up to this time we had thought that the only one of the original organs made in Van Nuys was the one in the Van Nuys High School. And apparently they're still two in the valley.

PEARSON: There should be and specification wise, they were all identical.

DODSON: I have heard that the one in the Presbyterian church in Glendale is the one that was built in Van Nuys. Are you aware of that?

PEARSON: Yes that's true. There are many church installations in this part of the world that were built there under various names. Even going back to the days...the original name of Johnson Piano & Organ Company, which was the very beginning of the industrial promotion show, we called the Organ Factory...but partial ability to sell real estate...is acknowledged...recognized when a great piece of land is broken up from farming into a quasar urban potential situation.

DODSON: Was the organ factory then originally Johnson Organ Factory, then California, then Morton?

PEARSON: The original enterprise was Johnson Piano & Organ Company. That went through the economic ringer, which I don't have all of the historical facts, which didn't seem of great importance to any of us. And the name California Organ Company was a stock company promoted with local residents, local merchants, the real estate operators to carry on. And eventually it became known after a few years as the Robert Morton Company, which came about by true entrepreneur type individual that got to be designated as sales manager, president and etc...

DODSON: Well then this man bought out the original California Organ Company?

PEARSON: No he didn't. The point I am trying to make here is the fact that any business going along, which is a stock company owned by the public, speaking of the public at that time being very small, the local residents, merchants, real estate operators and what have you. They were imbued by a high type of pitchman shall we say, because he was purely a sales type of entrepreneur and he was really going to make a great go of it. Subsequently, about five or six years later it went through a total economic ringer, that is failure, where the stock holders were threatened with suits etc... And the San Francisco bankers in that community

became interested by the events...the individual that I alluded to, who was the sales manager, became receivers and carried on with the name until 1929, when simultaneously sound pictures and the stock market crash were almost simultaneous, birthwise.

DODSON: This is very interesting, because no one has told us in details about the formation of the company. It really was a local company then, it wasn't something outside that came in here and started to plan.

PEARSON: In the very beginning, and my friend Paul Carlsted can verify this, because he was one of the first to actually be the original entrepreneur, that is Johnson, because the firm Johnson Piano & Organ Company. It was obviously a stock venture and I don't' recall if I ever heard who held the controlling stock. But it was created under the conditions of appropriating free land. For example, to build this factory on, which consisted of five acres at the corner of Van Nuys Boulevard and Oxnard Street, which of course today is Paulard Whitman Rob Automotive Agency.

DODSON: Well we're certainly glad to get all these facts about the organ factory, because we didn't have it from just this angle before and we didn't know the history of its founding.

PEARSON: Well that is the approximate chronology and in other words, what the entity saw was two economic ring ups, for all practical purposes.

DODSON: Incidently since we're talking about industry, one person has given me a picture of a corn products refining plant. To your knowledge was there ever such a plant as that in this area? It seems strange that we would have a corn products refining plant, since this isn't a corn growing area. I'm just wondering if she's just mixed up the pictures from some other place.

PEARSON: I would be more inclined to believe that it might of been a sugar refining plant, because at that time a great amount of sugar beets were harvested in the West end of the valley. But I'm not positive if they were actually processed in the valley. Now there was a great deal of fruit processing in the valley and primarily in Van Nuys and North Hollywood. In Van Nuys the primary fruit processing was apricots and I can vouch for that because as a youngster barely six years old I must of cut a few thousand apricots in half, so today I can't even look at an apricot.

BOYER: Was the valley mainly made up then...or the Van Nuys area of apricot orchards?

PEARSON: Well let me go back a little bit. Now, historically before any real estate development took place in the San Fernando Valley, it was primarily run by an individual named, Ian Van Nuys, who was a banker and farmer. And of course his name still hangs on a building in downtown Los Angeles. At the turn of century by 1898 or 1899, he apparently negotiated with interested and powerful people in the City of Los Angeles, including the original Harry Chandler...the famous Chandler family of the L.A. Times. Coincidently he was the first underwriter for the largest piece of real estate to be developed in the San Fernando Valley. The case then was of course two things. One was to get water in this valley, which was a desert basically, because they had been dry farming only wheat, oats, grains...primarily wheat. They had their good years and bad years, according to history. When the break up of these huge tracts of land, which were represented by the communities of now Canoga Park,

Reseda, Van Nuys, North Hollywood, then Lankershim, were probably divided into maybe not more than a dozen huge ranches, at the most. With Van Nuys being recognized the largest dry farm. So between the turn of the century and 1910 approximately, pieces of land were actually sold off

and certain people from the East, who were familiar with truck farming and special orchardry, planted great orchards of fruits. Apricots and peaches were the primary type. Then later came walnuts, which there were huge acreage especially in what is now known as Encino. Does that give you any rough idea?

DODSON: Then when you came out here in 1916, it was primary orchards in this area?

PEARSON: In 1915 there was at that time, purely a guess on my part, probably 200 medium size farmers. Going from truck farmers to orchard farmers and dairy. For example, we lived on the...just outside of the township perimeter on a five acre lot which was our home on the Southeast corner of Hazeltine and Vanowen Street. As you are probably aware of, Vanowen is the Northern perimeter of the township, Oxnard is the Southern perimeter, Hazeltine is the Eastern perimeter and Kester is the Western perimeter, and encompasses a mile square, which is a normal township. And beyond the main township the land first became broken up in 50, 20, 10 and 5 acre plots about the end of World War I and to a great deal of poultry farming on a small basis.

BOYER: Where did you go to school?

PEARSON: I went to school at Van Nuys Grammar School, which was located on Sylmar Street and the corner of Hamlin Street. Now that was before...I believe that the high school which actually finished or perhaps approximately at the same time or within about a year. Then eventually after going through the sixth grade at the grammar school, I transferred over to Van Nuys High School, which carried the grades seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven and twelve.

BOYER: How many people were in your graduating class, approximately?

PEARSON: In the high school graduating class, which was in 1927, there was 48 of us.

DODSON: There has certainly been a change since then. What was the population of Van Nuys at that time, do you recall?

PEARSON: It's very difficult to say. I would say that about 1915, there probably would of been about 5 to 6 hundred.

BOYER: So by the time you graduated school was there a great influx of people yet?

PEARSON: Well, there had been a modest influx of people, but nothing as you can see today, for example.

DODSON: We've been told that the great movement of population began after World War II.

PEARSON: That is correct.

DODSON: Well the area had remained primarily sparsely populated up through the second World War.

PEARSON: Well it was typically suburban, if I could use that term by comparison today. I hardly know an area that should be called anything but urban now, considering the bedrooms are piled on top of each other.

DODSON: Yes I've read that before to long, there will be solidly built up houses between here and San Diego. Do you recall any of the names of your teachers in elementary school?

PEARSON: The only one that I recall is Wayne, who subsequently went over and became one of the administrators at the high school, but I'm at a loss to go back that far.

BOYER: What would be a typical day for you?

PEARSON: Time wise?

BOYER: Yeah, when you got up, at school and when you got home?

PEARSON: In those days, first of all, there was no such thing as kindergarten. I started in the first grade and we were taught the three R's and we had to work it. As far as the after school operation time, most of the people out here had to be frugal to some extent and we worked, and had hobbies that would bring us in a few pennies, that sort of thing. As youngsters, to young to get into the industrial act, we picked potatoes behind a potato digger, talking about a production device. And we picked beans, which the machine could not pick up, which were left on the ground and we were paid, I think the big sum of 25 cents for 100 pounds.

BOYER: What did you do for recreation?

PEARSON: The recreation in those days was one of primarily community spirit and the church was the center of things, as far as community recreation. And secondly, incidently in Van Nuys, which I can vouch for, the then brand new high school was a congregating place for social ventures for the whole community. Even including summer barbecues. The community entertainment, for example motion pictures came, as I

recall after World War I finished, and the first entrepreneur to have a motion picture projection was the person...Sam Greenberg's father, who subsequently operated and built a couple of movie theaters in the town of Van Nuys, which were later absorbed by the famous West Coast Theater operation.

DODSON: We're moving towards the Fourth of July and what sort of celebrations did you have or that you can recall?

PEARSON: Well in the early days, of course bare in mind the chronology and date I gave you of 1915, indicates World War I, and those years from 1916 to 1918, the celebrations around Fourth of July were U.S. Bond sales for the war to end wars for all time and that sort of endeavor. And great patriotic individuals congregated at places like the Van Nuys High School auditorium, and had song fests and sell U.S. Savings Bonds, that I can think about at that time.

BOYER: Do you remember the feelings of the people at that time about the war?

PEARSON: The feeling of all the people at that time in the valley was one of being really super patriot. We believed everything that President Wilson and his super

political lackeys were telling us about, why we got into the war.

BOYER: Were there any people in the area that served in World War I?

PEARSON: Oh yes, I'm positive that there were. I can't recall at the present time. There were young men that served in World War I.

DODSON: Did you feel that there was a different attitude between World War I and II in the valley, in the way people accepted the war...that there was more enthusiasm in the first World War than the second one?

PEARSON: No I wouldn't say that. I would say, personally that as far as the eminence of our engagement in World War II, of course which affectively as we all know has become December 7, 1941 and affectively the following Monday is that...the whole of the communities in this valley were highly disturbed because it happened at Pearl Harbor and totally patriotic were the womenfolk. Plus the fact that there were stories about Japanese airplanes that were going to bomb the Pacific coast and we had block patrolman. We had blackouts in those days, I forget what we called them, but the residences and business would turn their lights out and what have ya.

BOYER: Were those just practice drills or did you have to do them every night?

PEARSON: Oh yeah, we had practice drills and...but that is getting a little faded, even in my memory. The nearest thing that we ever saw in this place was a Japanese submarine that fired a few shells along the Ventura coast where the oil refineries are today.

DODSON: Do you feel that there was any resentment against Japanese residents in the valley during the war?

PEARSON: Well unfortunately there was a divided feeling about...especially the American born Japanese, and I for one didn't think it was totally correct the way they herded everybody off. But that's a matter of choice and so called democracy.

BOYER: Do you know where they relocated the Japanese?

PEARSON: You read the news that the Japanese had an awful amount of time getting their property of all kinds back into their possessions, because they were putting trust into the trustor's, who were not the greatest.

DODSON: They didn't actually have to sell off their property on the spur of the moment. Was it put in trust for them, is that what was done?

PEARSON: Depending on what the property was, primarily. Those that had land then, let's say their offspring names, which would be U.S. citizens, but unfortunately the American born Japanese were herded up likewise and they had to get somebody to take care of that. In many cases there was a good deal of larceny involved. There was more sentiment against German ancestry in this valley during World War I, which was offset by the songs of the day.

DODSON: I was asking you about the bond drive. I was wondering if the school children was encouraged to buy bonds or anything like that?

PEARSON: Well as far as the school children were concerned, they had thrift postal savings, as near as I can recall, in other words stamps, it's the same thing. The bonds were called Liberty Bonds at that time, and our parents all bought them because they had a patriotic nature. We had sugarless Monday's and various things, purely on a patriotic basis.

DODSON: No ration pursay?

PEARSON: No, no ration pursay. For example, from the standpoint of priorities, I might get back to the entity of the organ company at that time...it had a high priority. Because at that time entertainment was considered a high priority to keep the spirits of the people patriotic, as well as the troops fulfilled.

DODSON: I see, so the organ company could get the sublime...

PEARSON: Oh yes, in fact they had no problems whatsoever in that area. And of course in tandem the motion picture industry was just starting to say "Let's save our socks and shoes." Probably the first real large motion picture theater of any real consequence was Grauman's venture called, The Million Dollar at Third and Broadway. As I recall opened in 1916 or 1917.

DODSON: Is it true that one of our valley motion studios opened in about 1915...

PEARSON: Universal City opened someplace in that time and frame.

DODSON: Do you remember the names any of the silent stars which you would particularly interested in or pictures you liked to see?

PEARSON: Well, we'll start off with a female. One of my favorites was Wilma Bankey. I don't know if she is still alive or not.

DODSON: I'm afraid that I can't add anything to that.

PEARSON: She played romantic roles and of course the males were of the cowboy variety up through...oh I can't possibly at a moments notice think of them now, because it's been such a long time.

DODSON: I think William S. Hart...

PEARSON: William S. Hart and Tom Henkes, that are names synonymous with that time.

DODSON: Mary Pickford was very popular...

PEARSON: Mary Pickford and she still happens to be alive.

BOYER: Did you ever go to any of the studios in the early years?

PEARSON: Not the early years. Later on the studio which is now Columbia Broadcasting in Studio City and was built in late depression times of the thirties.

BOYER: What about Warner Brothers? When was it built, do you know?

PEARSON: Warner Brothers was built...known as First National first, where they are today, in approximately 1932 or 1933. Those studios were sparked primarily by the transition from silent pictures to sound pictures, and of course talking about movie stars of that day...we can all remember Al Jolson, who I personally knew very well. And one of the biggest successes of Warner Brothers was when they coaxed Al Jolson to make that first sound picture where he played Sonny Boy. And of course that picture was pretty crude, because the sound was all done on a phonograph disc and synchronized with the actual film. Jolson came out here and became probably the most notorious resident. Now by the word notorious, as everybody realized he was here because...him and Rosie moved out here to the West coast, as I recall, about 1930 and he bought a piece of land in Encino, to build his dream honeymoon cottage. And to the best of my recollection, they moved into that place in 1935.

BOYER: Is that still standing?

PEARSON: No, that has been completely broken up into smaller

pieces. That was the approximate chronology. And of course incidently, he made famous a popular song, The San Fernando Valley Is My Home. The famous soap opera radio programs of that era.

BOYER: Were there any radio stations out here?

PEARSON: Yes. Now when we talk about radio stations, there's an explanation there. The transmitters were located out here. For example, KNX radio's transmitter, which was one of the highest powered at the time was out in Encino, just North of Ventura Boulevard. Now where this transmitter was part of the Sepulveda Basin right now.

DODSON: There was a very powerful station in the Los Angeles area, Earl C. Anthony Incorporated, is that KFI, heard all over the west?

PEARSON: That's correct. Of course KFI had a unique channel being one of the first allocations from the FCC, which if you recall was down to 640 Kilocycles and it is literally a clear channel and the frequency being as low as it is, especially in the night hours, those signals would go as far as Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

DODSON: Well, I'm from Colorado and we could pick it up in Colorado.

BOYER: Did they use to film out in the streets, as they do now?

PEARSON: Oh yes, if you're familiar with Bob Boulevard... incidently in that canyon before paved roads and Warner Brothers, and so forth, they use to film indian chases in that canyon.

DODSON: Since we're talking about that, is it true sometimes they use to jump horses across [SIC] in the north part of the valley, are you familiar with that? I've heard some stories that was used in the filming of westerns and possible riders jumping off of horses.

PEARSON: Well, I'm not familiar with that. Of course in the Chatsworth area there were a lot of ranch entrepreneurs that use to sell location time to motion pictures.

DODSON: Yes, I can remember reading about the Spahn ranch. What sort of jobs did you hold as a teenager?

PEARSON: Well first of all at my beginning as a teenager, and when I mean at thirteen, I started serving an apprenticeship,

as an organ builder to learn the trade to become a professional organ builder. So I spent every summer and after school to do that. By the time I graduated from high school, I was recognized at least as a well paid journeyman organ builder. And later on, up until the time, the last position I had, before the Robert Morton Company went through the economic ringer.

DODSON: Then what happened during the depression?

PEARSON: Well during the depression in my case I followed the organ business primarily, by going to work for an Eastern Firm, The NC Miller Company, outside of Maryland as a salesman representative and installation technician, and I struggled for a couple of years. And going to school at U.C.L.A., and doing some engineering work. And then later on after the Robert Morton Company were tired of taking all that they could take, a gentleman by the name of Carl B. Sackwell who had been a purchasing agent for the company, picked up the residue, which was some parts and a few broken up pipe organs and pulled it up to Van Nuys Boulevard and Sherman Way. And I operated with Carl Sackwell as a freelancer up until approximately 1942, when it became to tough to operate, because material during World War II which begun then, was just closed down priority wise, because you couldn't get metals.

DODSON: You were still making organs up until 1942?

PEARSON: The question you asked of me personally, I thought, was "what did I do?" I operated as a freelance organ builder and by that I contracted my own. For example, I had clients from here down to San Diego, and I use to sell them pipe organs coming out of theaters, rebuilding them, and installing them, and etc...

DODSON: Was there much difference between a theater organ and a church organ?

PEARSON: Oh yes, the typical theater organ, which you hear amongst the theater buffs today is a breed all of its own that was created to...silent pictures and vaudeville in those days. And an example of one of the early mixes which preceded the Wurlitzer Company, for example, is called a Hope Jones Unit Orchestra and that later became the relative pipe organ, which is a theater organ. The church organ pursay is a traditional instrument going back several hundred years, namely the Nordic countries, United Kingdom to the time of Johanas Bach, as you well know created the...which had the greatest impact on musical instruments of all time. There is no comparison internally or completely in their use. Now during the

depression, we use to modify theater organs to small churches, that was purely economic.

DODSON: Well that is why I asked because I thought the theater organ could not be adapted to the traditional church music.

PEARSON: No they're not. They are done for the so called romantic accompaniments and the crazy comedy accompaniments, the traps for sounds technicians...what have you, which have no place in church music.

BOYER: You talked about the depression...now you were living in the valley during the depression?

PEARSON: My home was always in the valley during the depression. When we were in the great depression of the 30's, which the whole country understood certainly, but they didn't talk about it in this local area, as much as they might of done as in the Eastern urban areas. You heard stories about selling apples on the corner of Manhattan, and what have you. We had to fend for ourselves and we had to be resourceful enough. In other words, I carried on in the organ business during those years of the 30's. Some times were good and some times were no so good. I also had some other enterprises, farming being one of them during the

DODSON: No, I'm speaking about to much of the valley in my opinion has been built up with just pure and simply shotty shelters.

DODSON: In other words, more character zoning probably...

PEARSON: That is exactly...when I mentioned planning.

DODSON: What has been your experience with earthquakes in the valley? Have they bothered you in places that you have lived in?

PEARSON: Well of course in 1933, it was one of the most severe that affected everyone, Long Beach, Compton, and those cities got the worst of it. The one we had here in 1971, certainly did it's share of shaking us up and damaging our property.

DODSON: Were you living here in Sherman Oaks at the time during the 1971 earthquake?

PEARSON: Oh yes, everyone in this house.

DODSON: Did it do any damage this far South?

PEARSON: Yes it did.

DODSON: Did it do any structural damage to your house?

PEARSON: We did. Some of it is still evident.

DODSON: It has been reported that many people felt the shock, but no damage.

PEARSON: Well there was more than a shock here, because that quake lasted here a good full minute. For example, the wife and I stood holding each other in the hallway, and wondering if the place was going to hold up or not. That's how severe it was.

DODSON: There were people that were living on the sides of hills in Burbank that reported a much more greater shock affect than those on the flat land.

PEARSON: Oh I'm sure that's true, because obviously in the geological formation of the...earth formations...we had gas pockets of various kinds...witnessed the geological explorations that the oil companies make when the earth has moved to different levels.

DODSON: Now sometimes we have asked about the earthquakes, people that we have interviewed have told us that floods were a much greater nemesis in Van Nuys than earthquakes, is that your feeling?

PEARSON: In the early days prior to...I'm going to say the last great flood in 1937, that I recall, many people including ourselves were washed out and damaged by several thousand dollars by rampaging and washing which had no flood control. And then of course, as you are aware we have what we call flood basins, two major ones, one is Sepulveda and one is...North of us, up by San Fernando. Those were built by the Army Corp of Engineers and funded by the Department of Interior, along with The Los Angeles Flood Control System during the 30's. The classic example, is that the basin runs as far back and free land to Canoga Park. I wished it never happened, but never has since then. But it was finished probably in about 1939 and those heavy winter storms since that time, the flood basins have taken care...of course all of the concrete channels that you see transversing the valley. In the early times and for many years, when we first came to this valley, no one thought of locking their doors for all practical purposes, there was no such thing as burglary. Witness to fact that the business community in Van Nuys as I recall at that time, before we had a police force, had a watchman who would see that a fire wouldn't start in the business community. But knowing what we have in the neighborhood, I'm quite appalled at what we see today. But that's quite understandable considering

that there is a million and quarter souls, I believe, something in that area.

DODSON: What do you think about changes in fashion? Has it been
good or bad?

PEARSON: Well I've watched for example, a trend syndrome. As far as female coverings are concerned, I don't particularly take them serious. It seems like they go in and out according to fashion, dictated by those greedy people that produce that kind of material. As far as the males are concerned, I can only say that I despise some of the ties that you have to knot, because they are so wide you can't do it. Other than that, it would appear to me, that everybody wants to go back to the turn of the century.

DODSON: You're the first person that has mentioned ties. Now that is a sore spot with me to, because I use to like to wear bow ties, so I had to give that up. A bow tie is about twice as large of what it use to be. It looks like the ones clowns wear in the circus.

PEARSON: Of course I was referring to the foreign hand tie.

DODSON: Well those have increased in size considerably to, as well as the collar it goes under, compared to what it use to be. How do you stand on such things on the valley leaving Los Angeles and becoming a separate city and county?

PEARSON: Well my personal feeling is that it would be quite desirable, but there is one ticker there, that no one really thinks about and that is the Department of Water and Power. And after all this valley and its region originally could be part of the City of Los Angeles' water.

DODSON: I think that the original idea was that you had to part of the City of Los Angeles to use Owens Valley water, isn't that correct?

PEARSON: That is absolutely correct. And that happened for all practical purposes it was completed I believe about 1915, but it was in the works there. Now for example, the original school district, was an individual school district that was underwritten by bond issues by the local residents here. And they created that even before the Los Angeles Unified Public School System got into the act. But the real import of the City of Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley was still water,

because essentially it is a desert. Cut the water off and it will return to that.

DODSON: Do you think that the valley could make some water arrangement that it would be impossible?

PEARSON: I don't say it is impossible for the simple reason that one of the things happening to the center city today is degregation and real estate values dropping and this community redevelopment project that is going to cost every taxpayer in the whole city a lot of money. Because the tax base is dropping to fast. For example, in one year this modest home of ours here doubled in taxes. And with the rate of normal inflation caused basically by the government outspending themselves, where does it stop.

DODSON: Do you feel that the central city redevelopment project will be of any advantage or value?

PEARSON: Just the opposite, it will cost, because it is a thing that the taxpayers have to foot the bill.

DODSON: So you don't see any benefits coming in return.

PEARSON: Well I doubt if it will ever happen in our lifetime.

DODSON: Now another of these great issues, is this matter of bussing children from the valley to other places. How do you stand on that?

PEARSON: Well of course I was brought up at the time when you had to be harshly rich to change a school that you desired to go to that was out of your immediate area...

END TAPE #1 SIDE B

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TAPE 2 - SIDE 1

DODSON: We were asking you how you sit on the bussing, when we change the cassette.

PEARSON: My feelings, if it were totally voluntarily and the individuals were able economically to defend themselves, such as we had to do when we were young, because we had bussing then...because we had to be transported to a central location. But the school district didn't pay for the transportation, we individually paid for it ourselves. Now there is a difference today. I don't want to get into the affect of the inference which might be towards immigration. I am totally for integration as a philosophy and first of all, I went to school on an integrated basis. We had ethnic groups at various times and we had the so called Hispanics, which is a fanciful name today for people that have names pertaining to Spanish heritage, when most of us might be basically Mexican. But I can't see how we can continue with the kind of a budget that's going on to economically carry on what some proponents of transporting elementary and high school students dimensionally on a geographic plain.

DODSON: Do you feel then with regard to whether it might be theoretically good or bad, or financially, it is not a good idea?

PEARSON: Financially it looks to me like it's just horrendously out of reason. Of course, as long as we have taxpayers that while...are not willing, may be able to drawn upon, who am I to question.

DODSON: Well of course, it looks as though the taxpayer won't have much to say about it.

BOYER: When you were going to school here in the valley were there any racial problems?

PEARSON: None whatsoever.

DODSON: There never has been any sort of tension in the valley amongst the various racial groups to your knowledge?

PEARSON: Well I feel that there is today, of course. But if you're speaking about the early days, I don't ever recall any.

DODSON: Most people tell us that they never heard of any. So I imagine if there was, it didn't amount to much.

PEARSON: No, I don't recall that sort of thing at all.

DODSON: Can you tell us about any important historical sites in the valley that we might not know about or old houses, or anything like that? Some of the city councilman in the valley are attempting to locate important historical sites, with the idea of trying to preserve them.

PEARSON: Well it seems like, for example in the town of Van Nuys over there, that the redevelopment agency is doing their damnest to wreck everything as fast as they can get bulldozers in there. And how the early people who had impressive type residences, the last one I can think of to go, is the one that Praise Water Funeral Home operated in and that was the old Whitsett estate. And of course the Whitsett estate on Van Nuys Boulevard was long demolished. The majority of the institutions such as public institutions, churches, they have mostly been remodeled and rebuilt to the extent that you wouldn't recognize the photographs of the early century, in any event. Probably the one that

resembled the earliest architecture is the Roman Catholic church across the street on Kittridge from the Van Nuys High School, that I can think of momentarily.

DODSON: How far back was that built?

PEARSON: I'm going back about 60-65 years.

DODSON: Then that church, is that old, then?

PEARSON: Of course it has been modernized to a great extent, but I think the frontal facade is retained, I'm not positive about this. It's something you might investigate on your own. I don't happen to be a Roman Catholic, but I wouldn't be an expert in that area.

DODSON: Yes we're glad to know about that because I don't think that's been suggested to anyone as one of the oldest structures in the city.

PEARSON: As far as the township of Van Nuys...there really wasn't anything of any impressive significance that I can recall. The original Dawdle P. Richard estate on Van Nuys Boulevard was a beautiful home built at that time, of course he was the same agent he

subsequently subdivided Van Nuys and actually would take advantage of those things.

DODSON: Where was that located on Van Nuys Boulevard?

PEARSON: It was located...the home property of the richest family was located North, starting at Kittridge and facing Van Nuys Boulevard and going to Vanowen Street. And I guess the first street is Cedros, isn't it? That's where a plot of land was the home place and they had orchards, a garden and a very nice home. Incidently the pipe organ was built by the California Organ Company, which incidently today is an old Christian Church in Van Nuys, which was donated by Mrs. Whitsett.

DODSON: Is that Christian Church one of the older churches too?

PEARSON: That probably was an example of an older structure, now that you led me into it. I would say that it's probably about 50 years old. See there's not much historic...for example, to the schools because of the earthquakes wrecked those and the grammar schools. And of course they came up with these bungalows, etc...

DODSON: That original grammar school must of been very unusual?

PEARSON: Well, for example the elementary school it had an auditorium.

DODSON: Yeah, then when it was replaced it was totally different kind of type of structure. How about the high schools, do they resemble the original one?

PEARSON: Oh that was completely done over. The original high school...the center building now represents the original structure and it had tall colonnades. The center of that building was the administrative offices and the auditorium in the early 40's. The only thing that remained were the concrete benches out front by the street.

DODSON: Do you know of any other long time residents in the valley, who you think we might be able to interview?

PEARSON: Off hand I'm not quite in a position to think of anyone...to many people are reticent to go into this sort of thing to some degree.

DODSON: Well, we appreciate you doing this.

PEARSON: Well I would say that Paul Carlsted, he was certainly and mentally up to it. He spent the years from about 1930 with the Los Angeles Public School District teaching these kids in the valley after the Robert Morton Company went through the financial ringer. But Paul Carlsted had a five dollar authority on schools on a contemporary basis, because...I believe that he spent, as I recall up until the day he retired, most of the time starting about 1930...

DODSON: Can you think of anything that you feel would be of interest that we haven't asked about at all?

PEARSON: Well following your guideline there, I haven't been following it to closely. Let me ask you what...I'm really concerned about this pyramid of information.

DODSON: Well I can tell you exactly what I have in mind. See my major is history. We can find out very easily or the future can find out very easily what year man landed on the moon. That's something that everybody thinks is important so there will be plenty of records about it. But if we want to know some little things about what ordinary life was like, we have trouble finding out that sort thing out, because nobody makes a record of it. Nobody

makes a record of what everybody knows at the time, because it doesn't seem to be of any importance. I use to tell my classes in Ancient History, that if they asked me something important I could probably answer the question. But if they asked what a typical Roman family had for breakfast 2,000 years ago, I probably wouldn't know. Because everybody knew the answers, so no one put them down. So what we're trying to do is putting down the answers that no one is putting down.

PEARSON: Well there is a feature, under those conditions that I wish to illustrate, which is purely personal. When the family moved to Van Nuys in 1915, my father had arranged for our home...one of the nicest things that I will never forget is that a family were kind enough to lend my family their horse and buggy, to drive to church. It was a nice buggy. At that time, we hadn't secured an automobile. Now the family, and I must name them, because they were well known, and the name was Millet. And there were several brothers who I believe most of them are gone now, but personally their offsprings must be around. When of the brothers was named John Millet and they lived on Vanowen Street, right near Calhoun Street. That is an example of the kind neighboring in the early days...

DODSON: Well that is the sort of thing we like to know. Whether people were selfish or were they unselfish.

PEARSON: I think the attitude was that...I don't recall hostilities of any venture. There was a certain amount of jealousy for those demonstrative affluent people. I'm talking about certain representatives. For example, the people that peddled chicken feed during those days and they took advantage of people that had been working the land that wouldn't produce, but they could make a living housing chickens. That was in the minority.

BOYER: Can I ask you something about your house? Did you build your house or did you buy the land with the house already built?

PEARSON: No, the first house was a modest family home, long gone now. And my father had it built in the township of Van Nuys, and we finally we moved out of the township North to just South of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, on Saticoy Street. They set it down there on approximately five acres of ground and we talked into raising chickens, for example a second income, which turned out to be a totally ridiculous fiasco, primarily because we were totally washed out, as I recall in 1924, when the Pacoima

wash let loose and let a thundering herd of water down, and left 30 inches of soot. I'm not saying that the whole element was corrupt, but there was some of the more affluent... but purely on a greedy basis became affluent. But there were a lot of affluent people there were quite generous.

BOYER: When you first moved into the Valley were there people still building homes or were they being built by contractors?

PEARSON: Most of them were done by contractors or self-contractors. It wasn't quite like the farmer of Iowa getting together with 20 other people to build a farm. The original home was wooden siding, later on came stucco.

DODSON: Do you have anything else you can think of else Paula?

BOYER: No, I don't think so.

DODSON: Do you have anything else you'd like to tell us?

PEARSON: No I can't think of anything at the moment of great concern.

BOYER: Oh, I have one last thing. What do you think will happen to the valley in the next fifty years?

PEARSON: Well, it would appear that if it stays for another fifty years, it will be a tremendously large ghetto. That's the only thing I can say.

DODSON: Well, we certainly thank you very much Mr. Pearson for your cooperation and the information you have given us. As I told you when we began, everyone gives a little different point of view in things we didn't have before, and I certainly think you have. You certainly straighten out the history of the organ, which we didn't have in complete form up until this time. So thank you very much for your help.

You have been listening to an interview with Mr. Arthur Pearson of 14356 Greenleaf Street, Sherman Oaks, 91423. The interview was conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson, Curator of the Los Angeles Valley College Historical Museum and by Ms. Paula Boyer, Field Deputy to Dr. Dodson. The date is June 17, 1977.

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